

Chapter 8

FWS Fire Management Planning Supplement

[Link to Redbook Chapter 8](#)

B. Interagency Fire Management Plan Template - To facilitate transitioning between the old FWS Fire Management Plan outline and the Interagency Fire Management Plan Template a [crosswalk guide](#) was developed.

B.2. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fire management planning is an integrated and complex activity incorporating interagency obligations, national and regional coordination, refuge operations, and resource management. It occurs within the overall National Wildlife Refuge System and National Fish Hatchery planning process and is much more efficient and effective if there is the requisite compliment of land/resource management plans completed and approved.

Regional Offices are responsible for coordinating unit, interagency and geographic fire management planning, within the Region. In addition the Regional Offices are responsible for establishing a formal review and approval process identifying who provides biological, technical, policy, fiscal review and how that review takes place.

- a. National Environmental Policy Act Compliance - As required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Fish and Wildlife Service has procedures for assessing environmental effects of specific Service actions. For actions not categorically excluded, an Environmental Assessment (EA), and if necessary, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), is prepared before making any land use decision, including fire management actions. See the Service NEPA guidance in 30 AM 2-3, 550 FW 1-3, and Departmental procedures in 516 DM 1-6; or consult with the Regional Environmental (NEPA) Coordinator for details on the NEPA process.

Departmental Categorical Exclusions are listed in 516 DM 2, Appendix 1. These are actions that do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the environment. Additional Service categorical exclusions are also included in the Departmental Manual in 516 DM 6, Appendix 1. If exceptions to categorical exclusions apply, under 516 DM 2, Appendix 2, the Department or Service categorical exclusions cannot be used. Categorical exclusions that may apply to the FWS wildland fire activities include:

- 1) Personnel training, environmental interpretation, public safety efforts, and other educational activities, which do not involve new construction or major additions to existing facilities.
- 2) Minor changes in existing master plans, comprehensive conservation plans, or operations, when no or minor effects are anticipated. Examples could include minor changes in the type and location of compatible public use activities and land management practices.
- 3) The issuance of new or revised site, unit, or activity-specific management plans for public use, land use, or other management activities when only

minor changes are planned. Examples include an amended public use plan or fire management plan.

- 4) Fire management activities, including prevention and restoration measures, when conducted in accordance with Departmental and Service procedures.
- 5) The use of prescribed burning for habitat improvement purposes, when conducted in accordance with local and State ordinances and laws.

The determination on whether a Fire Management Plan EA is needed is made at the field level with Regional Office consultation.

- b. Other Legal Mandates - Other compliance requirements include Section 106 of the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act, Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (as amended in 1973), Section 810 of the 1980 Alaska National Interest Land Conservation Act, and Section 118 of the Clean Air Act (as amended in 1990). Additional state and local compliance requirements may also exist.
- c. Fire Management Plan - Every area with burnable vegetation must have an approved Fire Management Plan. Fire Management Plans must be consistent with firefighter and public safety, values to be protected, and land, natural, and cultural resource management plans, and must address public health issues. Fire Management Plans must address all potential wildland fire occurrences and may include the full range of wildland fire management actions. Fire Management Plans must be coordinated, reviewed, and approved by responsible agency administrators to ensure consistency with approved land management plans. At a minimum, Fire Management Plans will be reviewed by the Regional Fire Management Coordinator for concurrence and approved by the Regional Director. Refuges should review and/or revise Fire Management Plans at a minimum of 5-year intervals or when significant changes are proposed.

The Fire Management Plan is a strategic plan that defines a program to manage wild and prescribed fires and use wildland fire for resource benefits. The plan is supplemented by operational procedures such as preparedness, dispatch, prescribed fire, step-up, prevention, monitoring, and wildland fire implementation plans.

A unit that uses wildland fire to achieve resource benefits (wildland fire use) must include specific prescribed conditions in the Fire Management Plan. Prescriptive criteria that must be included covers quantifiable criteria as well as clearly written verbal guidance that states under what conditions the wildland fire will be managed to achieve the stated benefits or suppressed. The prescriptive criteria that must be addressed in the FMP are the following:

- 1) Environmental and Fire Behavior – temperature, relative humidity, windspeed, wind direction, fuel moisture, ignition component, probability of ignition, flame length, rate of spread, spotting distance, and smoke duration and direction of movement, and at least one indicator of drought (e.g., 1000 hour time lag fuel moisture content, Keetch-Byram drought index, Palmer drought index, Emergency release component.
- 2) Legal Limits - Include elements that ensure compliance with legal limits and constraints. These may include, but are not limited to air quality laws ,

- threatened and endangered species protection, cultural resources protection, and mutual agreements and contingency plans.
- 3) Geographic Limits. Spatial or geographic prescriptions must include the Maximum Manageable Area (MMA). These may include: acres (single or multiple fire acreage), perimeter, percent of area, fire management unit, and ecosystem or sensitive resource(s) burned. Operationally, the MMA of a fire should be defined and approved by the line officer in a manner similar to a suppression action. The ultimate MMA will be defined in the Interagency Wildland Fire Implementation Plan for the specific incident.
 - 4) Administrative. In addition to prescription elements which specify the size of the fire and its behavior and effects, the workload requirements imposed from the management of the fire must be defined and met. All positions (overhead, logistics, equipment or aircraft) that will be required to manage the fire, will be identified in the Incident Action Plan.

D. FIREBASE

FIREBASE is a Windows based system, which FWS designed, and uses to program and budget for all fire management needs. These include preparedness, prescribed fire and fuels management. Funds and staffing are allocated based on the fire workload history for each station. Suppression operations and emergency rehabilitation are both funded by the Department of the Interior Wildland Fire Operations account and expand and contract as necessary to meet the emergency workload.

a. Preparedness

Preparedness needs are forecast based on the historical wildland fire occurrence at each refuge with weather and fuel conditions factored in as well. Staffing, equipment and funds are projected to provide sufficient initial attack capability to successfully suppress 95% of the unplanned fires, which occur within the 97th percentile of the local Burn Index (measure of potential fire severity). This figure is known as Most Efficient Level. While this may seem like a complicated process it is mostly transparent to the refuge user. Staffing and budgets are not established at the levels necessary to suppress 100% of the unplanned wildland fires. No Federal wildland fire agency attempts to suppress 100% of their fires because the costs outweigh the resource benefits. Additionally, Congress has never appropriated 100% of the Service's projected MEL needs.

Preparedness is more than just the ability to initial attack fires. It also includes training, medical and job task related testing of personnel, planning, maintenance and acquisition of equipment and supplies, interagency coordination, statistical analysis, and everything else required before firefighters are ready to do their jobs.

b. Hazardous Fuels Reduction Operations

Hazardous fuels reduction operations include the application of prescribed fire to reduce unwanted fuel loads and the use of prescribed fire as a resource enhancement tool. FIREBASE includes particular emphasis on FWS prescribed fire activities and needs. It assists in determining the needed staffing and

documents the support needs to safely and efficiently manage prescribed fire programs. Funding for the Hazardous Fuels subactivity actually comes from the same account as suppression operations. This approach was justified to give the Interior bureaus flexibility in conducting prescribed fires and fuels management activities. This flexibility brings with it responsibility to carefully oversee the use of these funds in a manner strictly dedicated to fuels management activity. An annual fund target is established based on the project proposals submitted and approved in FIREBASE. Suppression Operations Wildland fire suppression operations are funded from the wildland fire operations account, formerly known as emergency suppression operations. While the total account is a finite appropriation, it is based on the average costs for suppression and rehabilitation for Interior bureaus over the previous 10 years. In practice, there is an open ended authority to expend suppression funds as needed to manage wildland fires, and in certain instances to temporarily increase staffing for extreme fire potential situations. The agency fire management plan dictates what kind of management actions will be taken and the Wildland Fire Situation Analysis gives specific direction for any particular major fire incident. Emergency rehabilitation also comes from the operations account. The use of these funds for rehabilitation is limited.